

The Timeliness of the Young Mattick

A New Institute for Social Research

“Old formulae and old ideas are in the process of dying...The world counts on new forces, which are the heads and the hearts of the workers themselves.”¹

PROLETARIAN INTELLECTUAL SELF-ACTIVITY

1

It's an historical fact that proletarians invented the workers' council, at once our means of revolutionary combat and the germ of communist societal reconstruction, in the course of the early 20th century's waves of major class contestation—appearing first in Russia, then in Germany, then in workplaces and neighbourhoods across the world, from Hungary to Iran to recent echoes in Chile. It's less well-remembered but important that 'council communism' as a theoretical current was *also* an invention of proletarians, “trying to understand their own failures and that of the German revolution.”² The distinctive council communist ideas were: 1) that the 1917 bolshevik revolution's ultimate historical role was that of a “bourgeois revolution against the bourgeoisie”³ overseeing rapid industrialisation and capitalisation of agriculture in a

backward semi-feudal nation via jacobinical, state-capitalist⁴ political-economic forms; 2) that the revolutionary subject⁵ exercising the proletarian dictatorship would not be “an organisation formed previously to the struggle”,⁶ neither a party, nor ‘one big union’ which enlisted workers in advance, but rather the *entire class*, which would be driven by the necessities of crisis and combat to develop *in and through the revolutionary process* its own organs—councils—adequate to the task;⁷ and 3) it was pointless to try to organise or lead anyone—communist groups came together only for self-clarification in miserable times, and would dissolve into the surge of social revolution.⁸ This perspective was influenced by, and grew out of, the German and Dutch communist left: the staunchly internationalist radical fringe of the prewar social democracy that opposed socialist politicians’ widespread support of their national bourgeoisies in the first inter-imperialist war, rallied to the bolsheviks in the 1917 revolution, before criticising the Comintern and breaking to its left in 1921. The left-communists considered Moscow’s decree that all affiliated parties pursue trade-union and parliamentary activity a misinformed misapplication of practices that had become a reactionary anachronism in the capitalistically-developed west. But the council communists’ opposition to bolshevism went far beyond the communist left’s basically tactical disagreement, and was supported by a more profound and extensive historical and theoretical armature, which cohered gradually in the period from 1926-1936, when the world-revolutionary wave of 1917-1923 had already receded.⁹ Their theories were worked out by members of the Groups of International Communists (GIC) in Holland, the Communist Workers’ Union (KAU) in Germany, and the Groups of Council Communists (GCC) in the US,¹⁰ which bore more resemblance to small workers’

discussion circles than to the earlier left-communist parties like the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD),¹¹ which had split from the Communist Party (KPD) faithful to the Moscow line.¹² These innovative thinkers were young proletarians, whose schools had been the self-sabotage¹³ and long, painful disintegration of the revolution in Germany,¹⁴ protracted capitalist crisis, and the rise of fascism. That harshest of teachers, history, drilled into them lesson after lesson concerning the utter impotence and insignificance of all 'revolutionary groups' purporting to represent, catalyse, organise, teach, or lead the proletarians. The council communists were the first to articulate the hard truth that the workers' movement in all its phases and forms, even the most avowedly radical, had been bound to the ascendant era of capitalist development, and that any future revolutionary prospects rested on the insolubility of the contradictions and secular crisis-tendencies built into the capital accumulation process, not the goodwill or persuasiveness of pro-revolutionary ideologists. According to them, that era had ended with the advent of a global, fundamental crisis of accumulation which, while sometimes latent and sometimes catastrophically manifest, was now *permanent*, its face flickering through in all manner of social retrogression and barbarism¹⁵—so long, at least, as all life is held hostage to capital. Council communism is the theoretical expression of an historical break with all the baggage of the moribund *old workers' movement*,¹⁶ the one that haggled over the place and price of the labour-power commodity within capitalist society, championed as virtuous the drudgery of those forced to sell it, served as *tribunus plebis* in parliament,¹⁷ and at its most militant, even tried to recruit workers into industrial unions hoping to 'collectivise' commodity-production,¹⁸ or establish a

party-regime that saw socialism as equivalent to a state plan ‘fairly’ distributing the value pumped out of still-powerless, still-dispossessed wage-slaves.¹⁹ But when minorities of revolutionary proletarians began to grope toward *communism*,²⁰ the old workers’ movement, in spite of all its fine words, viewed their self-activity as an existential threat—since *all power to the workers’ councils* would put its political specialists out of a job—and ultimately showed itself their enemy in the 1917-1923 sequence. Bearing names like Paul Mattick, Henk Canne-Meijer, Jan Appel, Helmut Wagner, Ben Sijes, Alfred Weiland, Walter Boelke, and Sam Moss,²¹ the council communist thinkers were veterans of that sequence, working-class autodidacts who squeezed their theoretical pursuits in around their day jobs, when they weren’t driven into the army of the unemployed.²² In an effort to understand their own calamitous times, they studied the fine grains of Marx’s critique of political economy in prisons and in groups of jobless proles, meeting in squats and sometimes-illegal study-circles, hiding from the nazis, struggling through the Great Depression, rediscovering *Capital*’s contemporary relevance in a way no properly-trained marxist had for decades. For them, it was not doctrine to be learned and left to the side when it was time for action—it really *was* living social critique, with urgent explanatory power, shedding light on the crisis-ridden historical tendencies of capitalism buffeting their own lives.

2

It may surprise readers already familiar with Paul Mattick that he made his first attempts as a writer and thinker composing short stories drawn from his own life, since

he's now known for the recovery of Marx's critique of political economy as a critical theory of capitalist crisis. But these stories stand as one moment of a theoretical unity, interrelated with his critiques of economics and politics: they are essential to understanding Mattick's thought as a whole. Proletarian experience furnishes the content of council communist critique, even when highly theoretically mediated.²³ The virtue of Mattick's crisis theory is that it cuts through the mystifying talk of externalities and contingencies, never losing sight of the system's essential immanent contradictions. He always maintains a view from the conceptual standpoint of the *total capital*, never treats 'labour' and 'capital,' 'production' and 'circulation,' class struggle and self-valorising value, different nations and imperialist blocs and moments of social life as independent spheres or 'levels' or extrinsic forces—thus he can critically disclose *why they fetishistically appear that way*. Proletarian experience is itself immanent to capital, the first truly totalising social form in history. The turbulent phenomena of working-class existence and struggle attain concretion by tracing them back to the underlying categories of the capital-process. These husks and their algebraic exigencies at once constrain and compel us, yet their apparently autonomised trajectory can only move along its grooves by vampirising our real movement, our trimmed-down, separated, sold-off life-activity.

3

In the late 19th through early 20th century, the short story form, and its cousin the sketch, lived at an interesting, characteristically *modern* juncture of the popular-

journalistic and the avant-garde. Largely churned out for magazines and newspapers by semi-proletarianised writers-by-trade, these pieces were often sentimental, but just as often some combination of cynical, city-set, slightly risqué, or concerned with the lower classes. They could be formulaic, made to measure with morals or punchlines. But in their brevity, their very form tended toward the fragmentary shard,²⁴ in which flashed all the shocks of the harried urban working person's experiential reality²⁵—a subtly subversive slice through neat narrative conventions²⁶ conforming to a bourgeois ideology that told itself its reason was rational. This made the short story and the sketch attractive to precursors and pioneers of literary modernism—Charles Baudelaire, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, the Joris-Karl Huysmans of the *Parisian Sketches*, Remy de Gourmont, Marcel Schwob, Katherine Mansfield, James Joyce, the Jean Rhys of *The Left Bank*, Peter Altenberg, even Karl Kraus, Siegfried Kracauer, and Walter Benjamin, who blurred the lines between the short story and that other very modern form, the essay. These are fairly rarefied examples, but this nexus of low and high, accessible and experimental—in addition to a time-commitment small enough to be semi-manageable after one clock out—made the form ripe for deployment by proletarian writers,²⁷ especially those of Paul Mattick's stripe. Indeed the likes of Marx, Engels, and Hess took interest in, and saw power in, proletarian literature²⁸—the young Marx greatly admired the “*vehement* and brilliant literary debut” of tailor-writer Wilhelm Weitling, and he and Engels admonished the Bauer brothers that “modern prose and poetry emanating...from the lower classes of the people [shows that they] know how to raise themselves spiritually even without” the tutelage of critical critics.²⁹ Yet the (post-)social-democratic line, followed by Rosa Luxemburg as well as Lenin, was that in

capitalist society, working-class aesthetic production was inevitably rubbish, if not impossible.³⁰ It's true that there are plenty of examples of clumsy, maudlin, hamfisted art made by proles, both the hailing-our-culture and the bewailing-our-lot kind, though there's a strong argument to be made that it's prominent because it's what liberal bourgeois favour and patronise, either out of voyeuristic titillation, or a guilty urge to do cultural charity-work.³¹ But Mattick's experience of proletarianisation frustrating his aesthetic and intellectual passions, and his frequent crisis-born ejection from regular value-productive labour, prevented him from developing a sanguine, conformist, affirmative conception of working-class life. Rather, he had been drawn to and thrived amongst the working artists and writers of 1920s Cologne, steeped in avant-garde aesthetics and bohemian lifestyles,³² and his short stories largely avoid the aforementioned sentimentality. They don't lionise the health and virtue of the class transfigured into a kind of culturally-defined *estate* within capitalist society which merely deserves a fairer deal, but rather point beyond its very existence—indeed, the pieces have a ruthlessness that makes them almost communist *contes cruels*. And while some are sketch-like (“Crossing”, “The Jewish Market in Chicago”), and some frankly essays (“King Ben”, “Marinus van der Lubbe”), most are—though always inspired by his life—stylized nearly to the point of rough-and-ready allegory, peopled by symbolic figures. This is why they transcend the limits of conceptless social realism, and become *distillates*, polemics in the medium of narrative, pointed but rarely overdrawn. These pieces' broader truth-content depends on the fact that they express more than merely accidental particulars, without doing violence to the rich particularity of their material.

It's at once significant that Paul Mattick's early writing was born of *his own* experience, and artistically mediated in the form of the short story. This sets his work against the model of the *workers' inquiry*, later so popular among left-leninist intellectuals who were very proud of themselves for 'going to the people'.³³ The radical sociologist slumming it approaches the exotic experience of 'the workers' from outside, as an object of study, collects data in its immediacy, and analyses it—generally in order to find what he set out to find. Mattick has no need to fetishise working-class life as a separate object in this way, because it is *his* life. In the early 1930s, Anton Pannekoek—an academic and latecomer to council communist perspectives—paternalistically reproached Mattick and his friends who published *International Council Correspondence* for writing theory in terms that 'the workers' wouldn't understand.³⁴ Never mind that the journal's whole editorial group (and plenty of its writers) *were workers!* We educate ourselves. We write for our own self-clarification. Our terms are determined by precision, rigour, truth—they're not watered down to spoonfeed our fellows. Our writing thus is a weapon for a class supposed to be too stupid and stunted to ever grasp our social situation through our own efforts. Those who understand will, those who won't won't—though maybe they will one day, when driven by the force of historical circumstances. "The 'consciousness' to rebel against and to change society is not developed by the 'propaganda' of conscious minorities, but by the real and direct propaganda of events."³⁵ To be a seller of labour-power is to be ever a means, *being-for-another*, never an end in our own right. Only individuals who learn to think and act

for themselves will be capable of breaking out of this condition, of reconstructing the world from top to bottom, and we learn through the fight to do so.³⁶ While this process is necessarily social, relational, and intersubjective, we must be driven to it by an urgent need to critically comprehend *our own lives*, to transform them, to make them at last worth living, rather than a nagging sense of duty to some separate group or reified cause. Thus a working-class movement that will let itself be led or instructed or represented by anyone is useless from a revolutionary standpoint, as it merely runs along bourgeois grooves.³⁷ The intellectual and artistic self-activity of proletarians is in its very existence a protest, however modest, against our role-determination: a fungible, vacuous, massified, dehumanised labour-reservoir.³⁸ Mattick doesn't hand in clumsy strike reports to some learned professor or professional revolutionary whose job it is to schematically order the raw immediacy of the dumb manual worker. He styles and shapes salient fragments of his own experience into narratives that, taken together, are at once aesthetically compelling and have considerable critical content. And by doing so, he rattles the bars of the proletarian condition, clawing toward the potential of *human life* yet to come.

STORYTELLING AS CRITIQUE

5

Council communists have been frequently reproached for being myopically 'economistic',³⁹ either due to the importance they place on the immanent crisis

tendencies of the accumulation process, their focus on the workplace as the key site of struggle in which capitalist production can be directly arrested, or their hostility to forms like the party⁴⁰ that buttress the fetishistic separation—which communist revolution would need to overcome—of the ‘sphere of politics’ from the living ferment of real social practice.⁴¹ Paul Mattick’s early work, however, presents one more piece of evidence against this charge. The pieces collected here—written between 1924 and 1934 during Mattick’s last years in Germany at the bitter end of the post-revolutionary wave of proletarian contestation, and through his first years in Chicago as an immigrant in the midst of the Great Depression and unemployed workers’ movement—are clear contributions to a critique of capitalist society *as a whole*.⁴²

6

Mattick clearly doesn't see the capital-labour relation as obtaining only in the workplace.⁴³ His stories reveal capital as a total social form that penetrates every aspect—cultural, institutional, ideological, psychological—of proletarians' lives. Only the earliest story, 1924's “The Conveyor Belt”,⁴⁴ takes place at the point of production. For many decades, council communists have faced the accusation that they want nothing but to take over capitalist production processes and run them just as before, only without a boss.⁴⁵ Yet “The Conveyor Belt” dramatises how the time discipline necessitated by a system in which “moments are the elements of profit”⁴⁶ combines with subordination to dangerous machinery to result in the gory death of a worker. The issue is not whether the factory is private or collective property, but that the

proletarian “is only a thing, an appendage of the productive mechanism.”⁴⁷ Tragedies like this one could only be avoided if the associated producers themselves had real, substantive control over the content, aims, rhythm, and material-technical conditions of their production processes, as well as their overall social context.⁴⁸ Stylistically, the exaggerated grotesquerie of “The Conveyor Belt” bears some similarity to expressionist war-writing, like the “Three Fragments” of Walter Rheiner, first husband of Mattick's wife Frieda, who he knew around the time of writing in the radical artistic circles of Cologne. In Mattick, “the engine stopped shaking, and the belt groaned to a halt. His head crushed, it tilted down toward the workplace. One eye dangled from a long, slimy tendon next to his blood-smeared mouth, a cherry held gently by teeth. His leg hung from the transmission like a sweater in a wardrobe.”⁴⁹ In Rheiner, “a grenade tears through a group of comrades. One of them falls into his arms, the neck-stump gurgles hot blood into his face. Backbone and brain become icy, rigid.”⁵⁰ Mattick's allusion to the latter style of prose⁵¹ emphasises a social parallel via a formal parallel. He thus implicitly points to the unity of capitalist society—“wading in blood and dripping with filth”⁵²—which slaughters disposable proletarians in the factory's frantic race to valorise capital just as it does on the battlefields of inter-imperialist wars.

7

These early pieces show Mattick as a pioneer of what would later be called the critique of everyday life.⁵³ In his stories, the ‘spheres’ of politics and economics stand revealed as *what they are* beneath the fetish-forms and apparently objective categories:⁵⁴ the

social life and strife of *people*. 1927's "Crossing"⁵⁵ shows the competitiveness of the ethnically and occupationally fragmented proletariat on a transatlantic ocean liner carrying immigrants to the US, how the class structure follows us everywhere, and how we have all been compelled to internalise exploitative mentalities. The "Klingelpütz" story⁵⁶ wryly highlights the absurd barbarity of penal institutions, implicitly thematising the continuity of proletarian existence inside and outside of jail. The narrative is lent force by the fact that it was based on Mattick's brief time in jail as a result of taking part in a factory occupation at Leverkusen, and for his outstanding charges of sabotage of the Deutz plant during a strike, indicating clearly that prisons are a weapon on the other side of the class struggle.⁵⁷ Far from a syndicalist perspective whose beef with capitalism is exhausted by workplace grievances, much of Mattick's early work is concerned with the critique of bourgeois culture and ideology—especially evident in "King Ben", born of the shock and disorientation he felt upon emigrating to the US in 1926, and attempting to acclimate to working life there. This is one of the few pieces that's not so much short fiction as what Theodor Adorno would later term a *critical model*,⁵⁸ taking a particular contemporary phenomenon as an entry-point and tracing its contradictions in constellation, in order to bring to light the capitalist social relations condensed therein.⁵⁹ In fact, "King Ben"⁶⁰ bears striking similarities to Adorno's own early critical efforts of roughly the same time period—certainly in its tone, but also in its substance.⁶¹ The story of a charismatic cult leader surrounded by scandalous culture industry hype serves as the fulcrum of an uncompromising analysis of the ideological thralldom of the American working class⁶²—"psychological[ly] adapt[ed] to the law of life which values and treats the individual according to their

ability to make money”, they live vicariously through the media, “enjoy[ing] what they’re prevented from doing”.⁶³ Mattick paints a Janus-faced picture, arguably anticipating Adorno and Horkheimer’s dialectic of enlightenment:⁶⁴ the most disenchanted, hardened, “ruthless”, technologically-rationalised, capitalistically-developed nation is thereby also most prone to revert to “intellectual obfuscation,” archaic religious fundamentalism, fatalistic myth, “ridiculous mysticism”, and a “slimy fog of platitudes”,⁶⁵ succumbing to “the element of unreason [in]...a reason that merely serves particular interests”.⁶⁶ His savage critique of the illusions of those who think they can retreat from class society into cults and communes still finds plenty of targets today—not only among the proliferation of religious sects preying on fear and impotence, but also the voluntaristic radicals preaching *desertion* and *exodus*, busying themselves with neo-jeffersonian land projects, atavistic agricultural ventures, and the insular world of their allegedly prefigurative intentional communities.

8

One of the few other pieces collected here that’s not semi-autobiographical fiction is the spirited defence of Marinus van der Lubbe.⁶⁷ Van der Lubbe was a council communist construction worker who set fire to the Reichstag in 1933,⁶⁸ hoping to galvanise insurrection. He was subsequently slandered as a nazi agent provocateur⁶⁹ by the bolshevised Communist Party—at this point wedded to class-collaborationist electoral coalitions pursuing the ludicrous strategy of beating the fascists at the polls—and finally executed by the nazis on January 10th, 1934.⁷⁰ Mattick’s lucid, brutally

unsentimental assessment of the course of the workers' movement and the fundamental historical limitations of any communist revolutionary attempts in the early 20th century has always provoked the narrow, opportunist mind to proffer the pathetically smug 'gotcha': *so if making communism was impossible, and if the 1917-'23 world-revolutionary wave was doomed to (self-)defeat, what would you have us do? Nothing? Sit back with our clean hands folded in ultraleft purity, satisfied with our superior critical comprehension of unripe socio-historical conditions?* But this is not what Mattick did. He has an exemplary record as a street-fighter, a striker and factory-occupier, an expropriator, a participant in campaigns of the unemployed to directly seize their means of subsistence. Mattick once wrote a line pertaining to the slaughtered spartacists Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, which in fact reveals the secret key to his own attitude, as well as van der Lubbe's, who he obviously admired (in spite, perhaps, of his better judgement): "There were only two ways open for the revolutionists: either to go down with the forces whose cause was lost in advance, or to return to the fold of bourgeois democracy and perform social work for the ruling classes. For the real revolutionist there was, of course, only one way: to go down with the fighting workers. This is why Eugen Leviné spoke of the revolutionist as 'a dead person on furlough.'"⁷¹ The self-abolition of the proletariat is quite literally a desperate, suicidal drive.⁷² Perhaps the possibility of revolutionary struggle is bound up with the rock-bottom realisation that death is no worse than scraping out a miserable, stunted existence every day under capitalism, "a system which I find thoroughly repulsive and by which my life is spoiled", as Mattick put it in his clumsy but fiery fledgling English.⁷³ As a proletarian shuttling between the factory and the scrounging lot of the jobless,

Mattick was acutely, intimately acquainted with the way in which everyday life in capitalist society stripped him and his fellow workers of all honour, dignity, and independence, the very status of adult human beings worthy of reciprocal recognition and respect.⁷⁴ Van der Lubbe's gesture of revolt was hopeless, born of his own despair, and certainly did not awaken the class to action as he intended. Indeed, it arguably did more harm than good, and Mattick seems to have known this.⁷⁵ But it was the gesture of a man of integrity who would not countenance the electoral spectacle papering over the mounting terrorism against his class, while so-called 'communists' and 'socialists'—whose reactionary labour-nationalism had paved the way for fascism⁷⁶—time and again appeased the nazis in the Reichstag, "prolong[ing] their bankrupt existence not by combatting fascism, to be sure, but by...promis[ing] their capitalists...to do the fascist work in their own special manner."⁷⁷ Mattick could not sit by and passively sanction the KPD's salaried parliamentarians, puppets pulled hither and thither by the geopolitical strings of a state-capitalist regime, disgracing and abetting the murder of a revolutionary proletarian, a council communist comrade, acting in good conscience. Van der Lubbe died, in the face of all slander, staking a claim to the humanity constitutively denied our class. This is the poignancy of his tragic story. This is the reason Mattick, the most uncompromising of all anti-voluntarists, dedicated his final testament—*Marxism: Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie?*, a balance sheet of all prior communist thought and deed, ruthlessly exposing the insurmountable objective blocks on which it foundered—to a man he'd never met: Marinus van der Lubbe, perpetrator of one of the most futile voluntarist acts of the 20th century.

The proletarians in Mattick's stories are rarely what's conventionally considered 'politically motivated'—unless they're stooges he's mocking, as in "The Dream of the Bolshevised Professional Revolutionary".⁷⁸ 1930's "The Bees"⁷⁹ presents an equivocal picture of the daily life of Sam, a participant in the 1927-'28 Colorado miners' strike, who only joins up with the Industrial Workers of the World because the struggle compels it. He lives for his family even though he doesn't really seem to like them much, especially not his wife. He's married with children because it's *what's done*, and otherwise his life would be utterly empty drudgery. Tenderness comes only when Sam is drunk and exhausted, falling asleep on the floor, at last dropping his thorny carapace and letting his children climb all over him—much like Mattick's own surly father. There's a subtle critique of the bourgeois model and function of the family here: it's revealed in the story as one of capitalist society's few perfunctory, limited forms of social intimacy, which puts innumerable walls between men and women and children, but at the same time beats as the feeble heart of a heartless world, a reason for workers to go on living.⁸⁰

In recent decades, the French group *Théorie Communiste* have made an argument⁸¹—influential in the limited milieu that thrives on these debates—that the council communists must be disavowed because they *affirmed the proletarian condition*.⁸² Yet

Mattick's aim was "the abolition of the proletarian class through the abolition of all class relations",⁸³ and virtually nothing of this so-called affirmation can be seen in his stories. In "King Ben" he spells out, in words anticipating the situationists, that "the masses are forced to live such that life ends up passing them by".⁸⁴ Sam the miner in "The Bees" scrapes out a shit existence. To paraphrase Marx, only outside of work, when he's on strike, does he feel himself. Only then does he have half a chance to live his own time: "As a direct result of boycotting the factory and the mines, new conditions had taken hold. The alarm clock no longer forced them to gulp down boiling hot coffee. They were free to eat breakfast in peace. They could even attend meetings as they so choose. And they were finally free to do something for themselves...They were now acutely conscious that they were more than a tool, a screw or lever, or a wage slave."⁸⁵ This hardly sounds like a factoryist singing from the *arbeit macht frei* hymnal! Rather, to Mattick, those fighting for complete control of production by the free association of producers seek to decenter and *minimise* the place of necessary social provisioning⁸⁶ in their lives, making its concrete shapes as pleasant as possible.⁸⁷ For isn't having freely disposable time in which to enjoy life the only thing truly worth fighting for? The only true measure of wealth, beyond its narrow, impoverished, historically-limited determination as abstract labour-time? Workers' councils are thus not the *raison d'être* of some stakhanovistic fantasyland, but only a *precondition* of a communism oriented to the free development of each and all; to rich, all-sided activity; to pleasure; to rest; to beauty; to honest and profound social connection and communication and a love reinvented; to the unregulated expression of curious and marvellous individuality; to sensuous, intellectual, and emotional adventure; to truly *experiencing* our time not as

a dead husk carved up for sale, but as a stream surging forward with the vital pulse of desire, as we at last *consciously* make our own history, shape our own conditions of life. Mattick, faithful to Marx when few others were, says outright that our triumph means the end of our present conditions of life, not the same proletarian lot under new management: “If the proletariat ever succeeds, it will pass out of existence. When they become really human, when they rediscover what it means to laugh and fight, to truly love.”⁸⁸ So long as the proletariat remains the proletariat—the acted-upon, homogenised object-side of the social process⁸⁹—we drag on “the pre-history of humanity”,⁹⁰ what Adorno called mere bestial, apparently fate-ruled “natural history”⁹¹—Sam’s somnambulant existence. Only in open struggle against “this damned, dirty social order” do we step forward with confidence.⁹² Any scrounging back of a little pride, even Sam “slicking down his hair on Sunday”,⁹³ is an attempt at defiantly “walking upright” as Ernst Bloch once put it,⁹⁴ a refusal to assent to one’s objective status as a disposable tool for the valorisation of capital. This is no trivial detail, this is the very fuel and fruit of workers’ self-activity in the class struggle, its transformative power. This is why, if world revolution is ever to usher in *human* community, *no party* can exist that could possibly set itself and its interests over and against the proletarians fighting to overcome their proletarian condition.⁹⁵ A party is just more dead weight pushing our shoulders back into a submissive posture, breeding separate power and political specialists⁹⁶—with the explicit or implicit justification that someone needs to think for us because we can’t do it ourselves. No worker who has been driven to the point of fighting the old bosses will hesitate to fight the new bosses, as proven by all the 20th century proletarian uprisings across the whole world. So often

they fought regimes claiming to be ‘socialist’, and so often the proles organised themselves in councils.

11

Dignity, confidence, independence—from a lifetime of infuriating, humiliating experience, proles know in our bones that our conditions of life conspire to utterly squash these things in us. So often our character-structures are consequently constituted as meek, passive, emotionally stunted. So often we’re stuck in a rut of frustrated futility, self-loathing and resentful of others, quick to look for someone more powerful with whom to vicariously identify, or someone even lower on the social ladder to sadistically dominate.⁹⁷ Revolutionary struggle is born of the basest necessities—we would never take such life-and-death risks otherwise—but as it develops, it becomes more than this, it makes *us* more than we could ever be as proletarians in and through the very process of attempting to transcend that condition. In Otto Rühle’s luminous words, everything must be geared “to trigger the initiative of the masses, to free them from authority, to develop their self-confidence ... Every fighter must know and feel why he is fighting, what he is fighting for. Everyone must become in his consciousness a living bearer of the revolutionary struggle and creative member of the communist reconstruction. ... Therefore: transformation of the party-conception into a federative community-conception, as in the council idea. Therefore: supersession of external commitments and compulsion through internal readiness and willingness. Therefore: elevation of communism from the demagogic prattle of the

paper cliché to the height of one of the most internally captivating and fulfilling experiences of the whole world.”⁹⁸ This is what Mattick’s story “The Bees” illustrates, in however tentative a way. This is why the old struggles matter—however limited, false, fated, futile. No revolutionary proletarian who perished in the fight to become human must be abandoned to die a second time. If we let that happen, then *we ourselves* become the enemies Walter Benjamin feared, from whom “*even the dead* will not be safe”.⁹⁹

12

While Mattick powerfully depicts ‘apolitical’ proletarians forced to struggle out of necessity, he’s certainly not engaged in a myth-making project, singing the praises of an always-automatically-rebellious working class. He paints a complicated picture of workers pulled back and forth by contradictory social and economic pressures. “End of the Line”,¹⁰⁰ written in 1933, is an interesting, oblique approach to the era of rising fascism. The council communists contended that ultimately-futile efforts to manage, mitigate, or defer the now-permanent accumulation crisis were propelling capitalism into a phase of global fascisation, albeit with distinct and warring variants in different nations, depending on their respective socio-historical context.¹⁰¹ A major aspect of this developmental tendency has been the quasi-corporatist¹⁰² integration of the reproduction of the proletariat with the vicissitudes of the state-finance nexus.¹⁰³ Bill the streetcar worker in “End of the Line” is still a wage-labourer, but his class position is complicated by an investment scheme. He owns shares in the company he works for,

so he identifies his interests with that of the firm: “In theory, he owned at least a fraction of the car he drove. For these reasons, Bill had been a good worker. Anyone who rode for free was not only cheating the company, but Bill Waters as well.”¹⁰⁴ This paid off, for a while, and so he bought a house and became a small-time landlord, renting out a room. Bill’s situation—which would become common in the state-mediated, debt-financed reconstruction period following the second inter-imperialist war’s massive bleedout of surplus capital and labour¹⁰⁵—is emblematic of the way the class-relation slices across particular individuals, fragmenting their allegiances.¹⁰⁶ When his employer goes bankrupt in 1929, so does Bill, his ‘buy-in’ to capital backfiring. Without any clear sense of class consciousness or the concrete possibility of solidaristic struggle, he’s driven to aimless, resentful, private despair, going on a would-be shooting spree. He represents in miniature the response of the ruined middle-strata lashing out with fascist terror. In a hellish circle very much in evidence in recent years, subjectively fascist politics (only implicitly alluded to in this story) serve as a safety valve, sucking in the victims when objectively fascist economic developments prove unable to ward off the reemergence of capitalist crisis.

13

In sketches like “The Jewish Market in Chicago”¹⁰⁷ and essays such as “Black Americans”,¹⁰⁸ Mattick is attentive¹⁰⁹ to the racialisation of the proletariat, Black chattel slavery’s role in the development of capitalism, and how its legacy continues to scar and stratify workers, feeding intraclass competition.¹¹⁰ But he also points to the ways in

which the objective pressures exerted by capitalist crises, as they force former adversaries in the scramble to sell labour-power to struggle together, can begin to undermine racist attitudes among white workers, and how practical solidarity can overcome ‘racial’ division. This is the theme of “Dynamo”,¹¹¹ a 1934 story which appears strikingly relevant in the present historical constellation. Widespread immiseration, concentrated in racialised ghettos, results in proletarians unable to pay their rent. They hope that working as musicians or in the sex industry will afford them a better life, as the possibilities of ‘regular’ employment shrink with the capitalist crisis.¹¹² A spontaneous eviction defence spirals into a riot, in which police kill a Black man, Johnny, spurring further multiracial proletarian protests. Johnny’s neighbour Phyllis “marched in the demonstration following the coffins, wondering and crying. What were the red flags for, the songs, the chants; what did any of it have to do with Johnny? What did she have to do with any of this? Nonetheless, she marched, and thousands marched with her.”¹¹³ Then as now, it’s not clear to most proletarians what ‘politics’—radical or otherwise—have to do with their lives; nonetheless, there are times when their material conditions¹¹⁴ drive them to fight.¹¹⁵ Such mass actions don’t wait on party-education, they don’t wait on class consciousness, they’re not undertaken for any ‘ideal’—but, however nascently, they can transform their participants, sharpening their perception of the capitalist state’s barbarism and their own potential collective power. They can herald the dawn of class consciousness,¹¹⁶ and even, in the right circumstances, the formation of the class’s organs of revolutionary combat and societal reconstruction—the councils.

This is a lesson Mattick took from his own life, one that's hard to learn for political ideologists existing in rarefied realms who are rarely compelled to fight out of necessity. One of the most cogent council communist criticisms of parties¹¹⁷ is that even those like the KAPD, which professed the best of intentions *not* to exercise a dictatorship *over* the class, tend to spirit their members away to a myopic bubble in which it becomes difficult to discern the present reality of proletarian life through the thick mist of political preoccupation.¹¹⁸ This is a risk for all of us with an arcane interest in old marxist texts, but the young Mattick's stories serve as an antidote to seeing the world only through the schema of doctrine and 'positions', which are ultimately irrelevant if they're untethered to any material force. Mattick never tired of reminding us of this sobering truth, even as he poured his passion into theoretical clarification.¹¹⁹ In his early work, Mattick returns us to the social-historical *experience* that he always insisted marxism had raised to the level of science. Marx, in his mature critique, moved from the analysis of apparent phenomena on the surface of society to the underlying essential categories, which he then presented dialectically, tracing the logic of their inner connections.¹²⁰ These stories make the journey back to the social phenomena; then, interestingly, in his later critical theory, he turns to exposition of the essential tendencies in a way that would have been impossible if his thought had not been enriched by experiential content, if he had merely restated apodictic articles of faith. Marxism is not invariant dogma, it is its era comprehended in thought, through the ever-renewed movement between appearance and essence, discerning and illuminating

every intimation of the revolutionary overcoming of present conditions. This is why it is a science that must remain *living*, and thus open to grasping theoretically its real circumstances.

THE TIMELINESS OF THE YOUNG MATTICK

15

Though the stories of the young Mattick were written nearly a century ago, they feel urgent and timely, as the themes they treat still resonate remarkably with the contemporary reality of capitalist society. In the early 1930s, Mattick was studying Frankfurt School economist Henryk Grossmann and his reconstruction of the marxian theory of capital accumulation's self-undermining secular crisis tendency, which he posited would lead to a 'breakdown' of capitalist production.¹²¹ Grossmann's young readers, Henk Canne-Meijer and Paul Mattick, who exchanged letters discussing the former's theory in depth, were more attentive to the ways in which stagnating accumulation provoked state-mediated counter-tendencies which would keep the capitalist system dragging on in an ever-heightened condition of what they termed *permanent crisis*—sometimes latent, sometimes manifest, but always insoluble short of the revolutionary abolition of capital, or the extinction of humanity.¹²² For roughly a hundred years, we have been living in the era of permanent crisis,¹²³ which Mattick would spend the rest of his life analysing through the critique of prevailing bourgeois economic theories, proving that the policies based thereon were incapable of resolving

capital's immanent contradictions.¹²⁴ His early work provides a representative survey of the multifarious symptoms of the barbarism bred of an obsolete social form in its protracted death-throes, symptoms which still wrack our world, despite all the intervening years' phenomenal changes.

16

The socio-historical impasse Mattick perceptively depicted in these early writings is still ours. Accelerated time discipline in production on the one hand, masses of superfluous proletarians unable to sell their labour-time on the other, divided by national-ethnic, 'racial', and sexual stratification and competition, yet at times compelled to fight together despite it all, funnelled into penal institutions, grey economies, forced to fight for basic shelter, taking refuge in ideological cul-de-sacs, pseudo-community, and illusory palliatives, or the delusional self-importance of the professional revolutionary in some moribund sect, driven to desperate, isolated acts (whether principled, like Marinus van der Lubbe's Reichstag fire, or aimless, like the streetcar worker's gun-waving rampage), and occasionally spontaneous mass revolt which quickly burns itself out—these are the conditions familiar to anyone who has participated in and theorised the catastrophes and struggles of the present historical constellation. Mattick had no shortage of revolutionary adventures in his youth, but he left us no hagiography of those days or their protagonists. In his words, "as exciting as it is to recall the proletarian actions in Dresden, in Saxonia, in Germany – the meetings, demonstrations, strikes, street-fights, the heated discussions: the hopes, fears and

disappointments, the bitterness of defeat and the pain of prison and death – yet no lessons but negative ones can be drawn from all these undertakings. All the energy and all the enthusiasm were not enough to bring about a social change nor to alter the contemporary mind. The lesson learned was how not to proceed.”¹²⁵ If nothing else, Mattick and the council communists left us a map of traps and dead-ends. The way out of the permanent crisis remains, as ever, for the revolutionary class to discover.

¹ An anonymous proletarian in *Werkloozenkrant* (1931), a paper by and for the unemployed, edited by Marinus van de Lubbe.

² Mattick, ‘Otto Rühle and the German Labour Movement’ in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, 108. Originally published in *Workers’ Literature Bureau* #30-31 (May 1945).

³ Helmut Wagner, ‘Theses on Bolshevism’ *International Council Correspondence* vol. 1, no. 3 (December 1934), 11.

⁴ Lenin himself admitted and provided an apologia for the state-capitalist character of the bolshevik regime; see, among other places, V.I. Lenin, *The Tax in Kind* (May 1921). The council communists in turn exposed the incoherence of Lenin’s justification from a world-revolutionary marxian standpoint: Mattick, ‘Luxemburg versus Lenin’ in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, 41. Originally published in *International Council Correspondence* vol. 2, no. 8 (July 1936). For an earlier example, see Jan Appel, ‘Leninism is State Capitalism’ in Hermann Lueer, ed., *From Each According to His Ability, to Each According to His Needs!* (Black & Red Books 2021), 44-51. Originally published in *Proletarier* vol. 10, 1926.

⁵ For further determination of this now widely maligned and contested category, see A New Institute for Social Research, ‘Yes and No: On the Question of the Global Social Subject’ (2023), available at isr.press

⁶ Henk Canne-Meijer, *The Origins of the Movement for Workers’ Councils in Germany 1918-29* (Workers’ Voice 1972), 17. Original version published in *Radencommunisme* no. 3 (1938); trans. from a revised version in *Internationalisme* no. 45 (1952). Any groups formed in pre-revolutionary times were understood as at best impotent, at worst as hardening into inertial obstacles with particular interests over and against the class-in-revolt as a whole. Many historical episodes corroborate this view, but to take one of the strongest examples (because the blame can’t be placed simply on specific leninist forms) see the role of the anarchist CNT/FAI against the revolutionary workers in Spain.

⁷ The council communists comprehended that the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ expresses nothing but the emergency measures of the revolutionary war itself—the project of the whole class to eliminate classes, through its tendentially global association of councils, destroying or (re-)absorbing all separate powers. It becomes pernicious nonsense when waved around, however sincerely, as an alibi for a ‘socialist transitional society’. The real content of the latter can only be the prolongation or accelerated development of capitalism (indeed all that was historically possible in 1920s Russian conditions), as proletarians remain proletarians—dispossessed, impotent, value-productive wage slaves of the state, that old pig in new red lipstick. ‘The idea of [proletarian] dictatorship and of eliminating the proletariat are inextricably bound up with each other; to abandon one of them means to fall short of marxist dialectics’. Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Pontius als Reichsstatthalter’ in Theodor W. Adorno Archive, ed., *Adorno: Eine Bildmonographie* (Suhrkamp 2003).

⁸ Such pro-revolutionary groups merely ‘serve a personal need.’ Sam Moss, ‘On the Impotence of Revolutionary Groups’ *Living Marxism* vol. 4, no. 7 (June 1939), 27.

⁹ Cf. Philippe Bourrinet, *The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900-68)* (Brill 2017), part 3. For half a century, ‘the German-Dutch communist left’ and ‘council communism’ have been frequently treated as synonymous. But while there is indeed some common ground, shared protagonists, and a blurry historical transition between the two currents, their identification is factually inaccurate, conceptually imprecise, and glosses over their substantive differences. Bourrinet’s study, although politically hostile to the increasing divergence of council communists from their forebears, has the rare merit of insisting on its reality, and elaborating at length its significance. Paul Mattick’s work of the 1924-’34 period spans his development from a left-communist party militant emerging hot from the guttering flame of the German revolutionary turmoil to a pathbreaking council communist finding his own way amongst the largely ‘unorganised’ and ‘apolitical’ US proletarians, and is significant and fascinating for this reason, among many others.

¹⁰ Of which Mattick was a member, instrumental in writing, editing, and publishing their impressive theoretical journal, successively titled *International Council Correspondence*, *Living Marxism*, and *New Essays*, from 1934-’43. The completion of their evolution from a left- to a council communist perspective can be seen in the abandonment of their initial name, the United Workers’ Party (along with hopes of becoming a kind of American KAPD to the IWW’s American AAU), in favour of the Groups of Council Communists—which also more honestly reflected the modesty of their size and activity, and the looseness and plurality of their organisation.

¹¹ While the KAPD was fiercely critical of the bolsheviks’ opportunism and bureaucratisation, its own practice amounted to an attempted purification of the same tradition: it saw itself as the elite, intransigent vanguard of the class (‘hard as steel, clear as glass’ as Herman Gorter wrote in his 1921 ‘Open Letter to Comrade Lenin’) that would serve as a ‘political’ rudder to its ‘economic’ counterpart, the All-Workers’ Union (AAU), a mass workplace organisation somewhat along the lines of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The two sides of this formation debated which would execute the dictatorship when their time came! All this was an attempt to prolong the revolutionary contestation begun in 1918—and indeed the communist left was no sect, but briefly a mass working-class phenomenon, utterly dwarfing KPD membership in the early ’20s—and burnt itself out as that

historical constellation fell apart. As Mattick later saw, the day was lost long before the KAPD formed, indeed 'lost in advance', even at their height the upheavals in Germany 'minor frictions that accompanied the capitalistic re-organisation process', and the insurrectionary gymnastics of the communist left in which he participated in his youth 'merely whistling in the dark.' Mattick, 'Otto Rühle and the German Labour Movement', 95.

¹² Mattick satirised the KPD in 1925's 'The Dream of the Bolshevised Professional Revolutionary', published by Franz Pfemfert in *Die Aktion*, a magazine mixing avant-garde art and literature with communist agitation. Pfemfert belonged to the earliest tendency to break with the party-form entirely, and fell out with Mattick when he learned the latter was then still a KAPD member! Nevertheless, the story's venom points forward to Mattick's later critique of politics *per se*, showing the new ideas emerging within the institutional vestiges of the old workers' movement.

¹³ It's a signature insight of the council communists, reiterated to this day (Paul Mattick Jr., 'A Revolution to Remember' *Commune* no.1 (Fall 2018), 21-23), that the 1918 revolution in Germany was in many ways the author of its own destruction, which cannot be blamed on "betrayals"...leaders...specific forms of organisations, or certain philosophical trends.' Mattick, 'Council Communism' in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, 75. Originally published in *The Social Frontier* vol. 5, no. 45 (May 1939). The working class, for decades habituated to the social-democratic practice and thought appropriate to the preceding period of capitalist development and system-immanent struggle, was in large part actively opposed to a dictatorship expropriating the bourgeoisie and taking over all tasks of social reorganisation and administration. They showed powerful initiative in forming councils and action committees, but then didn't know what to do with them. They had only the most vague, minimal sense of what *socialisation* would really mean (never contemplating the elimination of money or wage-labour), and generally assumed it was not *their* business but the state's. Thus they kneecapped their own revolutionary organs, handing power to a constituent assembly. Only a farsighted minority of radicals vainly fought this turn; see Ernst Däumig, 'The National Assembly Means the Councils' Death' and Eric Mühsam, 'From Eisner to Leviné' in Gabriel Kuhn, ed., *All Power to the Councils!: A Documentary History of the German Revolution of 1918-1919* (PM Press 2012). This was not the heroic class meeting traitorous defeat, but historically-determined self-sabotage. 'The actual content of the revolution was not equal to its new revolutionary form.' Mattick, *Anti-Bolshevik Communism*, xi. Thus 'council communism' can in no way be equated with the heterogeneous practical council movement in the 1918-'19 revolution—the former was born of critical reflection on the collapse of the latter, though it did take inspiration from those revolutionary shop-stewards like Däumig and Müller who advocated a 'pure' council system.

¹⁴ The European council communist thinkers had been shaped by direct participation in one phase or another of the combat. What Alfred Sohn-Rethel said of the Frankfurt School's critical theory is very much true of theirs as well: 'In it re-echo the thunder of the gun battle for the Marstall in Berlin at Christmas 1918, and the shooting of the Spartacus rising in the following winter.' Alfred Sohn-Rethel, *Intellectual and Manual Labor: A Critique of Epistemology* [1970] (Humanities Press, 1978), xii.

¹⁵ Mattick, *World-Wide Fascism or World Revolution?* (UWP 1934).

¹⁶ This concept, since refined in countless discussions and texts, was first elaborated in Henk Canne-Meijer, 'The Rise of a New Labor Movement' *International Council Correspondence* vol. 1, no. 10 (August 1935). Though the relative merit of each is up for debate, Canne-Meijer's little-remembered essay influenced not only Mattick's 'Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler', 'Otto Rühle and the German Labour Movement', etc., but strikingly anticipated the later periodising moves of Moishe Postone, *Théorie Communiste*, Endnotes, and G.M. Tamás, suggesting that all were catching glimpses of a significant historical reality from different angles. See Moishe Postone, 'Necessity, Labor, and Time' *Social Research* vol. 45, no. 4 (Winter 1978); "'Théorie Communiste'" *Théorie Communiste* 14 (December 1997); 'A History of Separation' *Endnotes* 4 (2014); G.M. Tamás, 'Telling the Truth About Class' *Socialist Register* vol. 42 (2006); and our initial notes toward a critical synthesis of all of the above, 'The Casteless Class Society' (2020), available at isr.press

¹⁷ À la the social democracy.

¹⁸ À la anarchists or syndicalists.

¹⁹ À la the bolsheviks and all those pursuing nationally-bounded catch-up modernisation via a similar state-capitalist trajectory.

²⁰ Albeit more-or-less blindly, in historically-limited ways.

²¹ Among various others, many of whom contributed to the honing of ideas in discussion more than in print. Their practice of publishing anonymously or pseudonymously has contributed to their subsequent obscurity, but personal renown was never sought and rarely safe.

²² The grand old men of the communist left, Anton Pannekoek and Otto Rühle—academics by trade and veteran politicians who had formerly represented the radical wing of the social democracy in parliament—are routinely treated as council communism's foremost exemplars, yet they did not fully come around to the latter's theses and approach until the mid-1930s, after it had been developed by this younger generation. Their peer Herman Gorter died before the latter current branched off. It's true Rühle did break as early as 1920-'21 with the ideology of the party, but initially in a more-or-less syndicalist direction, unable to see beyond the 'organised class' at the point of production (whereas council communism looked to the self-activity of the whole proletariat). Rühle's tendency abandoned the KAPD/AAU dual organisational model, but still hoped to pre-assemble proletarian forces in one mass workplace organisation, the All-Workers' Union - Unitary Organisation (AAU-E), which would be ready and waiting to assume all 'political' as well as 'economic' functions when the revolution kicked off. The ever-erratic Karl Korsch only partially adopted a council communist perspective in the late 1930s when he collaborated closely with Mattick, but he never wholly renounced Lenin, even defending the *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* pamphlet in his (otherwise excellent) 1938 book *Karl Marx!* These elder statesmen never accepted Canne-Meijer and Mattick's reconstruction and deployment of marxian crisis theory, or its anti-voluntarist implications, remaining much more activist. The workers of the GCC rolled their eyes at Pannekoek's 'enthusiastic spirit will spark the revolution' stuff, yet it's a testament to the emphasis the tendency's pioneers placed on vital, productive disagreement that they greeted such outliers as comrades, without ever pulling critical punches. Council communism was not an invention of professors.

²³ For those of us who aim to comprehend our age in thought, the phenomenal immediacy of experience is, in itself, abstract—a contingent, isolated datum—but it reaches concretion (the growing-together of multiple determinations in their necessary inner connections) through theoretical mediation, which is a double-movement of *analysis* and *presentation*. See Marx, *Grundrisse* (MECW 28), 37-38 & 44. Without continually moving between these poles of empirical investigation and conceptual construction, as Mattick did throughout his oeuvre, *both* remain abstract, mere ‘facts’ stranded on one side, and ‘hypotheses’ on the other. For a cogent elaboration of Mattick’s approach and how it meets the most rigorous standards of materialist dialectic, see Gabriella Bonacchi, ‘The Council Communists Between the New Deal and Fascism’ *Telos* no. 30 (December 1976), 60-72.

²⁴ One of the most extreme examples being the French newspaper *Le Matin*’s regular 1906 feature ‘novels in three lines’, brutally terse decoctions of curious quotidian occurrences spat out by anarchist and champion of the avant-garde Félix Fénéon. See Félix Fénéon, *Novels in Three Lines* (NYRB 2007).

²⁵ See Walter Benjamin, ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’ in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (Verso 1997), 131-134. Originally published in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* vol. 8, no. 1/2 (1939).

²⁶ Spiritualised echoes of that monotonous plot arc: M-C-M’

²⁷ In the sense of proles—generally manual workers like your humble authors—who ventured into writing. It’s worth noting, however, that writers-by-trade were even then being increasingly proletarianised (or as Richard Gunn would put it, sliced across by proletarianisation), a trend that only continued apace in the intervening century as the permanent crisis gutted the middle-strata, and rendered more and more labour-power devalorised, casualised, precarious, if not utterly superfluous to the stagnating accumulation process.

²⁸ See Patrick Eiden-Offe, *The Poetry of Class: Romantic Anti-Capitalism and the Invention of the Proletariat* (Brill 2024), trans. Jacob Blumenfeld.

²⁹ Marx, ‘Critical Marginal Notes on “The King of Prussia”’ (MECW 3), 201; Marx & Engels *The Holy Family* (MECW 4), 135. Already in the 1830s, Weitling pioneered a proletarian-revolutionary communism, streetfighting in Paris and penning lyrical, millenarian calls for the community of goods while Marx was still at university. As Engels makes clear, he and Marx were no ‘founders’ of communism, as the later hagiography had it, but merely contributed theoretical clarification to an existing movement born of workers’ self-activity: ‘The section of the working class, however, which demanded a radical reconstruction of society, convinced that mere political revolutions were not enough, then called itself *communist*. ... Socialism in 1847 signified a bourgeois movement, communism a working-class movement. ... Since we were very decidedly of the opinion as early as then that “the emancipation of the workers must be the task of the working class itself”, we could have no hesitation as to which of the two names we should choose.’ Engels, ‘Preface to the Fourth German Edition of the *Manifesto*’ (MECW 27), 59-60.

³⁰ For more on this argument’s rationale, and a qualified counterargument, see A New for Social Research, ‘Enemies of Art for the Sake of its Realization’ *Cured Quail* vol. 2 (2020), 164-171.

³¹ The Works Progress Administration-type mix of heroic proletkult and dreary kitchen-sink-realist poverty-porn went over much better with the layers of middling-bourgeois and aspirational

professional tastemakers than did, say, the opaque experimentalism of the should've-been-legendary Ann Quin, since the latter, though subtly scarred by it, did not thematise working-class life at all.

³² Mattick's Cologne artist friends, expressionists and progressives, also shared left-communist commitments—though interestingly, while he was then a member of the AAU/KAPD formation, they joined the AAU-E, the anti-party tendency. Even then, Mattick was not particularly concerned with these formal-organisational schisms, making friends and comrades across them, an attitude he would eventually carry to its logical conclusion, as expressed on the *Living Marxism* masthead: 'The sectarian confuses the interest of his group, whether it is a party or a union, with the interest of the class. It is our purpose to discover the actual proletarian tendencies in their backward organizational and theoretical forms: to effect a discussion of them beyond the boundaries of their organizations and the current dogmatics.'

³³ I.e. the Johnson-Forest Tendency, Socialisme ou Barbarie, the *operaisti*. These groups' work is not without value, but there are fundamental epistemological and political problems with the relations of separation inherent in their approach. See Aufheben, 'We Have Ways of Making You Talk!' *Aufheben* #12 (2004).

³⁴ Roth, *Marxism in a Lost Century*, 141.

³⁵ Mattick, 'Pannekoek's "The Party and the Working Class"' *Solidarity* vol. 4, no. 39/40 (August/September 1941), 4.

³⁶ The struggle of the *class-for-itself*, which Canne-Meijer considered historically possible only with the bankruptcy of the old workers' movement in the era of permanent crisis, can be adequately understood only as the struggle for the one aim truly in the interest of the *whole* proletariat—the abolition of classes. This appears at the scale of individual workers as fighting *for ourselves*—our own lives and hopes and happiness—*together*. To do so involves confronting and practically working through our varied and often conflicting needs and interests in real dialogue, the communication of the differentiated. Only this process can sublimate the bourgeois antagonism of social interdependence and independent initiative, of universal and particular, ending the subsumption of individuals under *classes* and all other alienated role-determinations. As Adorno says somewhere, freedom is always freedom of the individual. And for what it's worth, this is hardly apostasy against Marx: 'Up 'til now average individuals participate in society only as members of a class. With the community of revolutionary proletarians who take their conditions of existence...under their control, it is the reverse; it is as *individuals* that the individuals participate in it.' Marx, *The German Ideology* (MECW 5), 80. *Bourgeois individualism*—narrow, competitive, monadic—is mystification concealing the real suppression of our potential for social individuality, which capitalist modernity itself has opened up, yet thwarted: 'Capital's ceaseless striving towards the general form of wealth...creates the material elements for the development of the rich individuality which is as all-sided in its production as in its consumption, and whose labour also therefore appears no longer as labour, but as the full development of activity itself', yet in the present 'this complete working-out of the human content appears as a complete emptying-out, this universal objectification as total alienation, and the tearing-down of all limited, one-sided aims as sacrifice of the human end-in-itself to an entirely external end.' Marx, *Grundrisse* (MECW 29), 251 & 412.

³⁷ Continually honed by council communists throughout the decades, notably including the Situationist International, an influential early version of this argument was elaborated in Otto Rühle, *From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution* [1924] (Socialist Reproduction 1974). And the old workers' movement *did* indeed run along bourgeois grooves, itself 'the co-author of bourgeois modernity', in the words of G.M. Tamás, 'Communism on the Ruins of Socialism' in *Art Always Has Its Consequences* (WHW 2010), 76. See also Mattick, 'Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler', 3-4.

³⁸ *Art* as a phenomenon or practice contains—albeit in sequestered, limited form—much of what in the heretofore brutal, nature-like history of the species points toward the possibility of *becoming human*; we make aspects of this argument in 'Enemies of Art for the Sake of its Realization'.

³⁹ By many French theorists of communisation, the various iterations, 'fractions', and offshoots of the Italian communist left, as well as the mainstream leninist tradition, to name but a few.

⁴⁰ And, in fact, the idea that proletarian revolution requires *any* self-styled conscious minority playing a specialised, alienated political role, seeing the persistence of the latter as the historical watermark of 'a non-revolutionary situation. When the revolution does come, their numbers will be submerged within it...as individual workers', spelling 'the objective end to all political leadership and to the division of society into economic and political categories' (Moss, 'On the Impotence of Revolutionary Groups', 27-28). It is on this issue especially that they break not only with social-democratic forms or their leninist variants, but with anarchists, and even *their own* precursors and/or past practices: when Mattick began these stories, he was a member of the AAU as a wage-worker, and a member of the KAPD as a communist militant—a classic left-communist dual organisational model he defended. By 1934, he was engaging in proletarian struggles for survival and marxist debates with the same ad hoc circles of people, increasingly critical of reproducing bourgeois society's apparent diremption of 'economics' and 'politics'.

⁴¹ 'Political as well as economic events appear as a series of "accidents" or "shocks", seemingly from outside the system but actually produced by this system, which precludes the recognition of its inherent necessities. The very existence of political life attests to its fetishistic determination. Outside this fetishistic determination, this helpless and blind subjection to the capital-expansion process, the entity of politics and economics would not appear as such, but rather as the elimination of both in a consciously arranged organisation of the social requirements of the reproduction process, freed of its economic and political as-pects. Politics, and with it, that type of economy which is necessarily political economy, will cease with the establishment of a classless society.' Mattick, *Marxism: Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie?* (M.E. Sharpe 1983), 255-256. The traditional marxists bounded by the limits of the old workers' movement generally took the categories of 'economics' and 'politics' for granted, assumed they had always obtained and would always obtain, and fretted over how to juggle them in theory and practice—which determined what? Was a given strike a 'political' one or an 'economic' one? Did the economically-blinkered workers need socialist politics delivered to them 'from outside'? This reified consciousness informed the entire ever-contentious debate on the proper relation of 'party' to 'class'.

⁴² 'Marx's analysis of capitalist society was neither an economic nor a political theory. Instead, by showing that bourgeois politics is dominated by economic questions, and that the latter are only the

ideological representation of social class relations, Marx demonstrated the limits inherent in both sets of categories, the political and the economic, for the explanation of social reality. ... Since Marx's time, however, the two aspects of his unified critique of politics and economics have been represented by different individuals ... Paul Mattick alone in our time recombined these strains into an analysis of the many-sided process that constitutes the capitalist mode of production.' Paul Mattick Jr., 'Introduction' in *ibid.*, ix-x. Trapped in the antinomies of bourgeois thought, the leninist epithet 'economism' misses this entirely.

⁴³ In fact, he later warned of the futility of fixation on the workplace in deep crisis conditions rendering large swaths of the proletariat superfluous to valorisation: 'Don't ask for work; simply fight for food, clothing, and shelter.' Mattick, 'The Future of Unemployment' *Living Marxism* vol. 4, no. 1 (February 1938), 13. The social ferment of most classical council communist theory and self-organisation in the 1930s was the unemployed movement, making the claim (heard in different versions from Sergio Bologna to today) that it's a skilled labour-aristocrat's archaism incomprehensible outside the factory, now rendered obsolete by deskilling, superfluity, or deindustrialisation, appear rather dubious. For Mattick's critique of this *operaist* line of reasoning, see 'Review of *The 'Other' Workers' Movement* by Roth & Behrens' *Kurasje* #12 (1976), trans. available at londonautonomygroup.wordpress.com

⁴⁴ Originally published in *Die Rote Fahne, Zentralorgan der Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* vol. 7, no. 18 (21 March 1924).

⁴⁵ This line of attack originates as early as the 1930s in *Bilan*, the journal of exiled Italian left-communists, where Jean Melis criticised the GIC's labour-time accounting scheme, building on that tradition's *maître-penseur* Amadeo Bordiga and his opposition to what he termed 'factoryism'; see 'Problems of the Period of Transition' *Bilan* #28 (February-March 1936). It was revived by Gilles Dauvé's 1969 'On Ultraleft Ideology', and renditions of the latter's case subsequently popularised, at least in the small circles of fringe communists concerned with such matters. For the English version currently read (when it is read, and not merely memetically paraphrased) see Gilles Dauvé and François Martin, *Eclipse and Re-Emergence of the Communist Movement* (PM Press 2015), ch. 4-5 — the original has been considerably revised and split across two chapters. There's merit to these critics' underlying concern that communist content not be lost to a fetishisation of council form, but their arguments betray a skewed and truncated engagement with the breadth of council communist theory and its self-critical development over time (as well as at times blatant conflation and confusion), which borders on what the ever-bilious Bordiga would call *imbecilic slander*. Consequently, in 1969 Mattick considered 'these kind of allegations...too stupid to be worth the trouble' of rebutting ('Serge Bricanier 1923-1997' biography, available at libcom.org), so the task has fallen to us.

⁴⁶ 1860 factory inspector's report quoted in Marx, *Capital* vol. 1 (MECW 35), 251.

⁴⁷ Mattick, 'The Scum of Humanity' *International Council Correspondence* vol. 1, no. 6 (March 1935), 13.

⁴⁸ Mattick did not describe this state of affairs with the controversial term 'self-management'. The debate around the Yugoslavian system, among other things, brought the concept into vogue in the 1950s-'60s. In that era, Mattick criticised those who pressed for an immediate move to so-called self-management without the world-revolutionary abolition of wage-labour and value-relations: even if

workers assume formal ‘managerial functions’ of an enterprise, ‘profit production and capital accumulation control their behaviour’ thus they ‘have to exploit themselves as if they were still exploited by capitalists.’ Mattick, ‘Workers’ Control’ [1967] in Priscilla Long, ed., *The New Left: A Collection of Essays* (Porter Sargent 1969), 393 & 395. Any attempt at producers’ control of production turns into its opposite if separated from its communist content—the ‘complete transformation of social production...[and] change in the form of industrial-technological development’ ‘oriented towards meeting human needs’, which in turn necessarily presuppose the end of the valorisation compulsion, since at present ‘the interdependencies of the value relations...determine the character of the technical relations.’ Mattick, ‘Introduction’ in GIC, *Grundprinzipien kommunistischer Produktion und Verteilung* (Rüdiger-Blankertz 1970), trans. available at libcom.org; and Mattick, *Marxism: Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie?*, 63. For a compelling exploration of what this transformation might entail, from the post-situationist branch of the council communist tradition, see For Ourselves, ‘The Negation of the Negation’ (December 1973), available at isr.press; and, more recently, Friends of the Classless Society, ‘Contours of the World Commune’ *Endnotes* 5 (2019).

⁴⁹ Mattick, ‘The Conveyor Belt’, in this volume.

⁵⁰ Walter Rheiner, ‘Three Fragments From a War Novella’ [1916] in *Cocaine: Selected Writings* (November Editions 2017), 48.

⁵¹ Which many of his 1924 readers would likely have caught, given the overlap of expressionist and communist circles.

⁵² Rosa Luxemburg, *The Junius Pamphlet* [1915] (Socialist Publication Society 1918), 8.

⁵³ See Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* [1947, 1961, 1981] (Verso 2014).

⁵⁴ Without thereby deflating or denying their power to compel. Because Mattick, like Marx, ‘refuses merely to register the reified, pseudo-objective structures of capitalist everyday life but seeks instead to bring the history congealed in them back to life, he comes up against the specifically human, if deformed, reality. Hence, in his view, even capital is not a thing “but a social relation between persons which is mediated through things.” The reduction of these people to mere “representatives of the world of commodities” is a negative condition that is yet to be historically transcended, not a scientific norm.’ Alfred Schmidt, *History and Structure: An Essay on Hegelian-Marxist and Structuralist Theories of History* [1971] (MIT 1983), 61.

⁵⁵ This story fictionalises his own experience coming to the US. Originally published in *Kommunistische Arbeiter-Zeitung, Organ der Kommunistischen Arbeiter-Partei Deutschlands* vol. 8, no. 36 (May 1927).

⁵⁶ Though Mattick had moved to Chicago in 1926, ‘24 Hours in Klingelpütz’ was serialised in the AAU’s paper *Kampfzucht* in 1930 (the last year before the AAU merged with the AAU-E to become the KAU, the first unequivocally council communist group in Germany). The story was written before his emigration, not long after his 1923 arrest in Cologne.

⁵⁷ Roth, *Marxism in a Lost Century*, 43-45 & 47.

⁵⁸ Adorno gives a sketchy, negative definition of ‘models’ as ‘not examples,’ but rather ‘guid[es] into the substantive realm’. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, xx. Characteristically, the model can be best understood in process: see *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* [1963, 1969] (Columbia

1998). Mattick's critical approach continued to parallel the Adornian model in its various shapes: compare the former's supremely dialectical constellation of the concepts 'Spontaneity and Organisation' in *Anti-Bolshevik Communism* to the latter's 'Marginalia to Theory and Praxis' in *Critical Models*, or "Static" and "Dynamic" as Sociological Categories' *Diogenes* vol. 9, no. 33 (1961).

⁵⁹ To 'unlock' 'the process stored in the object'. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 163-164.

⁶⁰ Originally published in *Kampfruf, Organ der Allgemeinen Arbeiter-Union* vol. 9, no. 41 (August 1928).

⁶¹ These similarities were surely coincidental at this point, though Mattick, first fascinated by the Institut für Sozialforschung's economic theorist Henryk Grossmann, would soon become an assiduous and insightful reader of its other members as well, decades before he wrote one of his major works in critical dialogue with Herbert Marcuse. He cited Max Horkheimer, opened 'The Jitterbugs', a masterful 1939 piece of social critique, with an Adorno epigraph, and occasionally placed book reviews with the Institut's journal. That said, its director Horkheimer—despite the clear council communist influence on his most incisive essays of the time, like 'The Authoritarian State'—condescended to Mattick, wary of the latter's intransigent, combative stance and untutored theoretical style, and repeatedly strung him along when he was in dire straits, reneging on promises of publication. We have argued, along similar lines to Felix Baum, that council communism and the Frankfurt School's critical theory were two threads—sometimes-parallel, sometimes-intertwined—of the same intellectual response to the demise of the 1917-'23 sequence and rise of fascism, only happening outside and inside the academy respectively; see Flex Baum, 'The Frankfurt School and Council Communism' in Beverly Best et al., eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory* (2018). But Mattick's experience with Horkheimer is emblematic of the inherently strained relationship between self-taught marxists living off gruelling hourly handwork and marxists trained in scholarly skills and conventions, afforded a modicum of dignity (if not always security) by their professionalised headwork jobs. This sort of difficulty persists to this day, as your authors can attest—the name of our discussion circle, lacking the benefits of institutional affiliation, is as much an ironic snipe as it is a tribute.

⁶² Contra the stereotype, oft-repeated in the ultraleft niche, that council communists think the proles are constantly champing at the bit to revolt, if only treacherous bureaucrats didn't muzzle them.

⁶³ Mattick, 'King Ben', in this volume.

⁶⁴ John Clegg has pointed out in personal correspondence that such anticipation hardly began with Mattick: 'this combination of the ultra-modern with archaic mysticism is also a common trope of European writing on the US, from Tocqueville to Baudrillard.' This is quite correct, though perhaps the very persistence of this trope supports the argument that Adorno and Horkheimer *really did* conceptually grasp the essential contradiction animating the phenomena prior commentators had described. To compare Mattick's claims to an excellent, clear, and succinct rendition of the theory—for decades misread and misused as irrationalist *kulturpessimismus*—which rests on the notion that 'a *ratio* that...absolutize[s] itself as a rigid means of domination' results from and perpetuates 'a lack of rationality' not an 'excess', see Adorno, 'Reason and Revelation' in *Critical Models*, 135-138, a model similarly concerned with religious revivalism. See also Marcel Stoetzler, 'It Only Needs All' *OpenDemocracy*, 24 June 2017.

⁶⁵ Mattick, 'King Ben'

⁶⁶ Theodor W. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies* [1963] (MIT 1993), 74.

⁶⁷ Originally published in *Der Freidenker* no. 5/6 (4 January 1934). Published years after his move to the US, this essay demonstrates that Mattick never ceased to be invested in the struggles of workers in Germany, which had shaped him from a very young age.

⁶⁸ Van der Lubbe went to his death insisting he acted alone, in the name of the world proletariat. The nazis claimed he was a KPD agent. The KPD claimed he was a nazi stooge, and called for his execution in the widely-circulated 'Brown Book', which made a rather outlandish case. Council communists and anarchists formed an international defence committee, which published a 'Red Book' countering the stalinists' charges—Mattick's piece was a contribution to this effort. It's since come to light that the KPD's case employed forged documents, but exactly what *did* happen is still regularly debated by the same sorts who enjoy debating the Kennedy assassination and such things.

⁶⁹ Employing a strange homophobic conceit to boot! Every good stalinist knows that decadent cliques of gay nazis (a pleonastic pair of terms!) regularly pick up stray commie bricklayers for a little arson-and-chill.

⁷⁰ Six days after the publication of Mattick's article.

⁷¹ Mattick, 'Otto Rühle and the German Labour Movement', 95.

⁷² 'The capitalist conditions of social production force the working class to accept its exploitation as the only way to secure its livelihood...[and] cannot be defied except by suicide.' Mattick, *Marxism: Last Refuge of the Bourgeoisie?*, 303. At present, this can only mean the suicide of the individual worker, but in a revolutionary situation, it means the suicide of the proletariat as a class.

⁷³ Mattick, response to the questionnaire 'What Will I Do When America Goes to War?' *Modern Monthly* vol. 9, no 5 (September 1935), 267.

⁷⁴ A sentence like this would likely have made Mattick squirm, (rightly) wary as he was of emotional and ethical waffle blotting out materialist analysis. But Marx characterised the proletariat as 'in its abasement the *indignation* at that abasement' (MECW 4, 36), and certain marxists have made a powerful case for the place of such 'warm' considerations in the adequate comprehension of class struggle, from Bloch to Pannekoek, Marcuse, Vaneigem, Thompson, Bonefeld, Gunn, and Wilding—and his early works reveal that Mattick's blood too ran surprisingly hot.

⁷⁵ Much of the council communist milieu criticised such so-called 'exemplary acts' cogently, and ultimately correctly. The views Mattick later espoused in *International Council Correspondence* very much echoed the GIC's scepticism toward this sort of propaganda by deed, and propaganda generally: 'it is not up to us to make the masses move; that can only be the necessary result of social relations.' GIC, leaflet in *Spartacus* no. 19 (March 1933).

⁷⁶ See Mattick, 'Karl Kautsky: From Marx to Hitler'.

⁷⁷ Mattick, 'The Competitors of Fascism,' *International Council Correspondence* vol. 1, no. 11 (September 1935), 13.

⁷⁸ Originally published in *Die Aktion* vol. 15, no. 15/16 (August 1925).

⁷⁹ Originally published in *Kampfruf, Organ der Allgemeinen Arbeiter-Union* vol. 11. no. 1, 4 and 5 (January 1930).

⁸⁰ See Theodor W. Adorno, 'On the Problem of the Family' [1955] *Endnotes* (2022), and Ellen Willis, 'The Family: Love it or Leave It' *The Village Voice*, 17 September 1979.

⁸¹ In 'Much Ado About Nothing' *Endnotes* 1 (2008), among many other places.

⁸² Interestingly, the rationale is an historical one, a kind of reprise or reinvention of the crisis-theoretical periodising move first made by Canne-Meijer and its consequent distinction between the old and new workers' movements, except with the dates, details, and terminology changed. Now council communist theories and practices are themselves consigned to the litter bin, dubbed 'programmatist' and 'class-affirmative'. The latter concepts *do* have incisive critical force, but it's debatable whether TC deploy them adequately, and to what extent these charges apply to council communism—especially since the latter, itself a modest historical wager, explicitly rejected invariant or prescriptive programs adopted in advance of the revolutionary process, ever-developing through the effort to comprehend its ever-developing context. Likewise, it's in our estimation doubtful whether the new periodisation actually has greater truth-content or explanatory power than the old one. For a council communist perspective on aspects of these admittedly tangential controversies, see A New Institute for Social Research, 'Theses on the Council Concept' (2020), available at isr.press

⁸³ Mattick, response to the questionnaire 'Was the Bolshevik Revolution a Failure?' *Modern Quarterly* vol. 11, no. 1 (Fall 1938).

⁸⁴ Mattick, 'King Ben'. Compare, to take one of many examples, Raoul Vaneigem, 'Basic Banalities' part 2 in ed. Ken Knabb, *Situationist International Anthology* (Bureau of Public Secrets 2006), 154. Originally published in *Internationale Situationniste* #8 (January 1963): 'The vast majority of people have always had to devote all their energy to *survival*, thereby denying themselves any chance to *live*.'

⁸⁵ Mattick, 'The Bees', in this volume. Mattick is emphatic: expecting proletarians 'to take pleasure in their work is out of the question. They have to endeavour to get away from it in order to assert themselves as human beings.' Mattick, 'The Scum of Humanity', 13-14.

⁸⁶ We're grateful to Patrick Murray for the 'provisioning' terminology, an ingenious means of simultaneously evading the anachronistic eternalisation of the historically-specific category of alienation 'labour', while recognising that securing the material subsistence requirements of the species is—as unpopular as it is to admit in some quarters—a transhistorical necessity. See Patrick Murray, *The Mismeasure of Wealth: Essays on Marx and Social Form* (Brill 2016), 101, 217, & 400.

⁸⁷ Mattick made clear that in communism, 'the wealth of society would be measured not by labour time but by free time', thus it must entail 'decreas[ing] necessary labour-time' (Mattick, *Critique of Marcuse: One-Dimensional Man in Class Society* [1969] (Merlin Press 1972), 47 & 27), even to the point of 'the abolition of human labor, or at any rate, of unwanted and disagreeable human labor' (Mattick, 'The Economics of Cybernation' *New Politics* vol. 1, no. 4 (1962), 20). In his 1970 critical introduction to the GIC's *Grundprinzipien*, cited above, he even suggested that their 1930 proposal of 'calculation of average socially necessary labor time', which he considered a transitional 'inconvenience' in violation of 'communist principle', had become historically 'superfluous' since 'the social forces of production are sufficiently developed to produce means of consumption in abundance', to be freely shared. Root & Branch, heirs to Mattick's brand of theoretically-sophisticated council communism, suggested instead that the reproduction process could be coordinated via feedback loops of needs and their

fulfilment, and indeed had come so far in their critique of the economy and its role-determinations as to assert that ‘in a free society, people will be neither “workers” nor “citizens”, but simply people — people who cooperate in a variety of ways to produce the kind of life they desire to lead’, and “economic planning” [will be] no longer a separate sphere, but rather completely merged with urban planning, environmental planning, residential planning and the like’ (Jeremy Brecher, ‘A Post-Affluence Critique’ *Root & Branch* no. 4 (1973), 13). Thus many of the critiques referenced in footnote 58 appear as obsolete as the GIC’s scheme.

⁸⁸ Mattick, ‘The Bees’

⁸⁹ As previously noted (regrettably, though typically, in passing), and as can be read between the lines of Mattick’s story, proletarian women are so determined in stacked, overlapping senses. Even the proletarian man, in his masculine sex-role, if not in his role as a worker, gets to entertain the compensatory illusion that he is a self-determining subject, at least in relation to the female object he acts upon: ‘any man has this power as *man*, the dominant sex, to dehumanize woman’ (Meredith Tax, ‘Woman and Her Mind’ [1970] in Anne Koedt et al., eds., *Radical Feminism* (Quadrangle Books 1973), 28). For the classic treatment of the subject-object dialectics of sex, see Simone de Beauvoir’s now-neglected opus *The Second Sex* [1949] (Vintage 2011), and for pathbreaking discussion of their relation to class, see Lydia Sargent, ed., *Women and Revolution* (South End Press 1981).

⁹⁰ Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (MECW 29), 264.

⁹¹ Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 354-358. Similarly, Mattick considers capitalism as still sunk in ‘the animal kingdom’. Mattick, ‘The Competitors of Fascism’, 15.

⁹² Mattick, ‘The Bees’

⁹³ Mattick, *ibid.*

⁹⁴ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* vol. 1 [1959] (MIT 1995), 147.

⁹⁵ And devotees of various party-concepts promising *their* version won’t in practice do what all the rest have done will not make it so. The issue is not this or that specific organisational form or lack thereof, but ‘the division between a conscious minority and an unconscious majority’, as ‘the “consciousness” of the minority is either meaningless, or it is connected with a power position in society’—it’s usually meaningless, but if it’s the latter, ‘the conscious group defends its position as a conscious group...against the “unconscious” mass.’ Mattick, ‘Pannekoek’s “The Party and the Working Class”’. We’d worry we’re flogging a dead horse here, if not for the fact that the horse is not so dead as it once seemed. Not only does ‘class-affirmation’ no longer seem historically impossible in the age of resurgent labour-nationalism, what’s worse, the surprising recent return of all manner of often nakedly vanguardist and authoritarian party-mongering—in widespread disrepute from 1991 through the early 2010s—on ‘the left’, and radical milieus beyond, makes this old argument seem necessary again. For a critique of the problems with even the most attenuated party-concept, testing a kind of ‘limit case’, see: Jason E. Smith, “‘Possibly Sometimes Not So Informal’: Gilles Dauvé’s Party’ (2015), available at academia.edu

⁹⁶ Before which we’re once more expected to doff our caps, humbly accept our scrip we can’t even use to cop a drink, and say ‘thank you, enlightened custodian of the species’.

⁹⁷ This kind of analysis of proletarians’ introjection of authoritarian psychological patterns is primarily associated with the research of Wilhelm Reich and Frankfurt School thinkers like Erich Fromm,

Adorno, Marcuse, and Horkheimer. However, in yet another point of connection, it was pioneered within the council communist tradition by Alice Rühle-Gerstel and her husband Otto Rühle. They too saw the primary means of this subjective mutilation as the male-supremacist family in its bourgeois form, thus recognising the liberation struggles of women and youth as essential moments of communist revolution.

⁹⁸ Otto Rühle, 'Report From Moscow' in *Non-Leninist Marxism* (Black and Red Publishers 2007), 167-168 [translation amended]. Originally published in *Der Kommunist* no. 37 (September 1920).

⁹⁹ Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History' [1940] in *Illuminations* (Shocken Books 1969), 255.

¹⁰⁰ Originally published in *Neue Deutsche Blätter, Monatsschrift für Literatur und Kritik* vol. 1, no. 4, 15 (December 1933).

¹⁰¹ For early versions of this argument, see: Heinz Langerhans, 'The Next World Crisis, the Second World War, and the World Revolution' *International Council Correspondence* vol. 1, no. 8 (May 1935)—written on cigarette paper and smuggled out of a nazi prison—and Mattick, 'The War is Permanent' *Living Marxism* vol. 5, no. 1 (Spring 1940). Opposing in advance the thesis popularised by Friedrich Pollock, Mattick was very clear: the global tendency toward fascistic state-capitalism is 'no sign of "progress," as many people believe. It does not correspond to a "higher stage" of capitalism, but...is only the political expression of the stagnation and decline of the capitalist system; it is barbarism.' Mattick, 'Was the Bolshevik Revolution a Failure?'. For our case that this theory was correct and, despite decades of hyperventilating about 'neoliberalism' in all quarters, this tendency never abated, see A New Institute for Social Research, 'Preliminary Notes on Objective and Subjective Fascism' (2022), available at isr.press. Jamie Merchant's recent article, though (somewhat) more cautiously worded than ours, hopefully portends a long-overdue recognition that the 'fragmented state-capitalist hellscape' we now inhabit represents but an 'intensification' of a 90-year trend 'of fading growth prospects and rising state involvement in the private economy.' Jamie Merchant, 'The Economic Consequences of Neo-Keynesianism' *The Brooklyn Rail*, July/August 2023.

¹⁰² 'Class collaboration indicates the first step in the fascisization of capitalist society' Mattick, 'Review of *Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* by Harold J. Laski' *Western Socialist* (June 1944), 8.

¹⁰³ All the neo-social-democrats who think this sadly ended with the collapse of midcentury welfare-statism, and dream of reviving the latter through sheer political will, ought to ponder for a second the essential continuity of this tendency with recent decades' precipitous rise of working-class indebtedness, supplementing our debased wages, now paid in a currency-form backed by gargantuan state debt tied to the fragile balance of inter-imperialist competition. There has been no retreat of the state; capital's constitutive forms are now mediated through it! Duncan Foley cogently notes: 'in contemporary economies...a fictitious capital, the liability of the state, rather than a produced commodity, functions as the measure of value...suggest[ing] a remarkable symbiosis between capital and state', asking 'is it purely a matter of historical accident?' Duncan Foley, 'Marx's Theory of Money in Historical Perspective' in Fred Moseley, ed., *Marx's Theory of Money: Modern Appraisals* (Palgrave Macmillan 2005), 46. The council communists saw long ago that it was not, and called it fascisation, a complex of responses to the permanent crisis.

¹⁰⁴ Mattick, 'End of the Line', in this volume.

¹⁰⁵ See Chris Wright, 'Its Own Peculiar Decor' *Endnotes* 4 (2014).

¹⁰⁶ See Richard Gunn, 'Notes on "Class"' *Common Sense* no. 2 (July 1987).

¹⁰⁷ Originally published in *Urania, Kulturpolitische Monatshefte über Natur und Gesellschaft* vol. 8, no. 12 (1931/1932).

¹⁰⁸ Originally published in *Urania, Kulturpolitische Monatshefte über Natur und Gesellschaft* vol. 9, no. 9 (1932).

¹⁰⁹ And continued to be in the GCC's journal: see 'Southern Negroes', *Living Marxism* vol. 4, no. 4 (August 1938); Mattick, 'Review of *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* by John Dollard' *Living Marxism* vol. 4, no. 3 (May 1938); Mattick, 'A "Marxian" Approach to the Jewish Question: Review of *Nationalism and the Class Struggle* by Ber Borochov' *Living Marxism* vol. 4, no. 5 (November 1938).

¹¹⁰ Despite Mattick's conclusion, intraclass competition is treated in the latter essay more as a phenomenal form than as the essence of racialisation—his account in fact focuses on the differentiated status of sellers of labour-power, legal persons who have *property in themselves*, vs. racialised slaves who do not, and its survival as a caste-like brand of abjection on Black Americans (even after the 'emergency economic measure' of formal emancipation). This idea remains highly pertinent to the present constellation, where questions of racialisation and 'racial' domination are constitutively entangled with those of legal (non)personhood vis-a-vis immigration, incarceration, etc. For explorations of this fruitful approach to racialisation, see Chris Wright, 'Ideas Stirred Up By Adolph Reed Jr.'s "How Racial Disparity Does Not Help Make Sense of Patterns of Police Violence"' (October 2016) and 'Reconceiving Race and Capital' (April 2017), available at howsickly.blogspot.com

¹¹¹ Originally published in *Neue Deutsche Blätter, Monatsschrift für Literatur und Kritik* vol. 1, no. 9 (June 1934).

¹¹² Mattick focuses here, as in many other places, on what we would now call the 'surplus proletariat'; see Surplus Club, 'Trapped at a Party Where No One Likes You' *Kosmoprolet* (2017). Mattick and the council communists were very prescient in descrying *right at their inception* long-term historical tendencies that have since become pervasive and obvious. Thus his insistence that 'in the lumpenproletariat the workers can only see the face of their own future' ('The Scum of Humanity', 17-18), like the announcement of permanent crisis, or the impotence of the old workers' movement, which for decades seemed overstated catastrophism, have become major themes in recent years.

¹¹³ Mattick, 'Dynamo', in this volume.

¹¹⁴ Ever-shifting historically, bound as would-be-sellers-of-labour-power are to the exigencies of the capital-process. This concept is best taken in the most expansive sense, as encompassing all the practical social relations in which we're enmeshed.

¹¹⁵ 'Real action will come only when the masses of *unpolitical* people start to move.' Peggy Hopper and Steve Foldz, *I Don't Want to Change My Lifestyle — I Want to Change My Life* (Root & Branch 1972), 2. Mattick marshals Marx against the leninist bourgeois-revolutionary fetishisation of political understanding: Mattick, 'Luxemburg versus Lenin', 42-43.

¹¹⁶ 'As long as the class struggle is fought on the terrain of political economy, it remains within the capitalist relations of production. To be done with these relations, the capital-labor relation, and hence political economy, must be abolished.' Mattick, *Economics, Politics, and the Age of Inflation* (M.E.

Sharpe 1978), 91. Thus we must understand ‘class consciousness’ not just in terms of awareness of shared conditions or interests, as the old workers’ movement did, but shared awareness of the negativity of the class-relation as such, the heteronomy of proletarian labour, the futility of our lot within this society, and a drive to escape it. Moishe Postone termed this latter dimension that contests the terrain of political economy ‘*class-transcending consciousness*’, arguing it ‘becomes *possible* only beyond a given point in historical development.’ Postone, ‘Necessity, Labor, and Time’, 782-783. We would say that this point is the beginning of the era of permanent crisis, the point at which the tendential superfluity of proletarian labour to production begins to appear as the impossibility of producing profit at a rate able to sustain accumulation on the requisite scale. Mattick’s stories express a nascent class-transcending consciousness that would take decades to become more widespread, as does the category of the ‘new workers’ movement’ (less an empirical description of new phenomena than a critical conception of a new historical potential against which to measure them), born out of a collision with the limits of system-immanent gains, which can only find its forms in spontaneous struggles. ‘Dynamo’ reveals the inner dynamic of one such struggle—not coincidentally tied to late capitalism’s increasing inability to guarantee the reproduction of the surplus proletariat—and its transformative potential, demonstrating that *spontaneity* can only be equated with blind ‘automaticity’ or ‘unconsciousness’ from a standpoint blinded by fetishism (as Mattick later theorised in ‘Spontaneity and Organisation’).

¹¹⁷ And indeed of groups of pro-revolutionary minorities *per se*, which we argue are usefully thought of collectively as ‘the party’, vis-a-vis their subjective, if not always objective, separation from the class, their self-positioning as its ‘vexed observer’; see A New Institute for Social Research, ‘This Party Sucks’ (2020), available at isr.press

¹¹⁸ Thus pro-revolutionary groups tend to ‘see revolution in the most impossible situations and believe that all that is lacking for revolution is a group with the “correct marxist line”...they exaggerate the importance of ideas, and incidentally of themselves as carriers of those ideas.’ Moss, ‘On the Impotence of Revolutionary Groups’, 27. Even groups who today have gone to great lengths to avoid the latter two defects often succumb to the former one.

¹¹⁹ The bitter tension implied can be seen, for instance, in ‘The War for a Better World’ *Living Marxism* vol. 5, no. 3 (Winter 1941), 61. Here, Mattick of course rejects ‘the worn-out slogans of national independence’ and the ‘swindle’ ‘that the workers could ever improve their lot by choosing among their enemies’ in wars between capitalist states. But his perspective is more lucid than the typical left-communist injunctions to principled proletarian internationalism, howled into the void, because he also recognises that ‘the question as to what the “labor movement” should do in regard to the war...is an artificial question, for there is no labor movement which could raise it in actuality.’

¹²⁰ See Schmidt, *History and Structure*, esp. 33-43.

¹²¹ Not only would it take us too far afield from the work under consideration, it would be fruitless to attempt to offer here a potted gloss of the specifics of the production-immanent crisis theory as developed by Marx, Grossmann, and Mattick. The theory has never been able to survive such cursory summarisation without distortion and vulgarisation, contributing to its bad reputation and frequent misunderstanding. Readers unfamiliar with the arguments, see principally: Marx, *Capital* vol. 3 (MECW 37), part 3; *Grundrisse* (MECW 29), esp. 80-142; and Henryk Grossmann, *The Law of*

Accumulation and Breakdown of the Capitalist System [1929] (Pluto Press 1992). Mattick developed his rendition of the theory over many decades, the earliest being ‘The Permanent Crisis’ in *International Council Correspondence* vol. 1, no. 2 (November 1934), arguably the definitive being *Marx and Keynes: The Limits of the Mixed Economy* (Porter Sargent 1969). See also Paul Mattick Jr.’s impressively lucid and concise account, *Business as Usual* (Reaktion Books 2011).

¹²² Though developed extensively by Mattick, the term ‘permanent crisis’ is Canne-Meijer’s coinage, a refinement of Grossmann’s ‘final crash’. The former concept ‘highlighted the dead end from which the economy appeared to have no means of escape, without suggesting a predetermined outcome. Mattick listened to Canne-Meijer carefully, and he adopted this terminological convention.’ Roth, *Marxism in a Lost Century*, 110.

¹²³ For a recent sketch of our version of this argument, see ‘Preliminary Notes on Objective and Subjective Fascism’. The category ‘late capitalism’, used by the Frankfurt School to designate this same era, acquires greater determinacy when cross-referenced against the council communist theory of the permanent crisis—though this is perhaps unsurprising, as Adorno never ceased referring to Grossmann as ‘my teacher’ (Theodor W. Adorno, *Philosophical Elements of a Theory of Society* [1964] (Polity Press 2019), 104), defended Marx’s account of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, and like Mattick maintained that ‘efforts to ward off or postpone the system-immanent tendency are already prescribed within the system...[and]...enact the law of crisis against their own will’ (Theodor W. Adorno, ‘Introduction’ in *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* [1969] (Harper & Row 1976), 37).

¹²⁴ See Mattick, *Marx and Keynes*; Mattick, *Economics, Politics, and the Age of Inflation*; Mattick, *Economic Crisis and Crisis Theory* [1974] (M.E. Sharpe 1981).

¹²⁵ Mattick, ‘Otto Rühle and the German Labour Movement’, 95.